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A Dissertation on Rheumatism

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admitted March 19th 1822

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Rheumatism. March 19 1828

Among the diseases incident to the human body there are some which excite an uncommon degree of commiseration on account of their fatal tendency; whilst others, though occasioning far greater pain, fail to excite much sympathy, because they seldom terminate in dissolution. In neither instance, is it usual to take the guage of actual suffering, or calculate its duration. This popular estimation of the character of diseases, seems to establish a scale of exertion for the physician, who rightly judges that his mightiest efforts are demanded against those disorders, which sap the foundations of life. It is, nevertheless, a noble achievment of "the healing art", to expel such diseases as, though not dangerous, are distressing and severe, and fasten upon the patient with the most enduring pertinacity. Of this class is Rheumatism, the subject of the present Thesis.

Rheumatism is a disease of cold cli-

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mates. Among its remote causes, atmospheric vicissitudes are perhaps the most powerful and active. And as this cause exists in a greater degree in the northern and eastern parts of the United States, than in any country in Europe, it is fairly to be presumed, that the disease itself is more prevalent here, than upon the other side of the ocean.

The general cause of rheumatism, is cold affecting the surface. The disease commences its attack often upon sudden exposure to this agent, or after a considerable change of the weather from warm to cold, particularly when accompanied by a damp atmosphere. But instances have occurred, of persons, who had suffered much exposure in their youth, remaining free from rheumatic affections until visited by old age, which came accompanied by the disease in question; and in these instances, the patients themselves, have with great confi-

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dence and plausibility, ascribed the complaint to their early hardships. Thus I have heard soldiers of the Revolution, when recently seized with rheumatic pains, say that these were the effects of the fatigues and sufferings of that remote period. It may also be admitted as a settled truth in the history of this disease, that like gout, consumption &c. it often descends from parent to child.

As to the precise seat of rheumatism, whether it be the muscle, the ligaments, or the membranes, does not appear to be satisfactorily ascertained. Its situation, however, is chiefly in the region of the joints. It differs from gout, among other things, in principally attacking the larger joints. At first, it usually invades ~~the larger joints~~ a single joint, sometimes two or more; often it unexpectedly passes from the joint originally attacked, to a neighbouring one, from which it as unexpectedly returns. It attacks persons of all

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ages and constitutions, though the middle aged and those of plethoric habits, are most usually its subjects. It is distinguished by acute or aching pains affecting the joints and sometimes extending to the adjacent muscles, which probably are sympathetically affected. I have known the tendo Achillis to be also thus affected to such a degree, as to produce extreme pain and inconvenience. Its modes of approach are very irregular. In some instances, its attacks are quite sudden; sometimes it immediately succeeds violent muscular exertion; and sometimes it is preceded ~~by~~ for many days, by premonitory symptoms, such as general lassitude and debility, stiffness of the limbs, and shooting pains.

Rheumatism is divided into two species, tonic and atonic, or according to Doctor Cullen, into acute and chronic rheumatism.

Tonic rheumatism is that form of the disease, which is attended with increased arterial

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[illegible] the [illegible] is the cause of consumption
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precedes the inflammation of the lungs, though
not in [illegible] cases [illegible] [illegible] considera-
[illegible], to disorders of the stomach. But
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which it [illegible] many of the characteristics of
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that it never terminates in suppuration. It has
been [illegible], or [illegible] that chronic rheuma-
tism and [illegible] are relieved by an effusion from
the parts inflamed. This suggestion may be admit-
ted if we suppose the [illegible] effused to be lar-
ger since an [illegible] in a cavity does not produce irrita-
tion, but if the effusion is a liquid, it is difficult
to conceive why it does not terminate in suppura-
tion. The pyrexia which attends on rheumatism
sometimes rises to a considerable height, bearing

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such degree according to the space and part affected in the principal disease. On characteristic the fever occurs and every symptom is aggravated towards evening one of the leading causes of which the motion, to which the patient is subject during the day.

Atonic rheumatism differs from tonic in this that it is not attended by inflammation of the parts, nor by pyrexia. The sensation produced by it is, however similar, its situation is the same; and from these circumstances, connected with those of its great obstinacy and of its never preceding, but following upon the acute or tonic type, we are induced to believe that it is the same disease in fact with the tonic, divested of its concomitants, fever and local inflammation. The attendant symptoms, however, together with the peculiar treatment which each form requires, justify the distinction.

Having spoken of the cause and character

of this most painful disease, both of which are too obvious to call for much disquisition, I pass on to speak of its treatment.

The treatment of rheumatism is to be regulated by the form of the disease, according to the division already stated. The propriety of attacking it with energy in its tonic form must be apparent, when it is considered, that by repelling it in this, which is in truth, the incipient stage of rheumatism, the patient is effectually saved from the more obstinate form of atonic rheumatism, and that, on the other hand, if by a course of feeble practice, we succeed in barely alleviating the symptoms of the tonic, the disease instead of being subdued, settles down into the atonic state, in which it possesses tenfold tenacity.

In the first, place in order to give due effect to the proper remedies in tonic rheumatism, when it is highly inflammatory, rest and an

antiphlogistic regimen, are indicated. At the head of these remedies, we are bound to place the lancet, which should be bold & complete, so long, as the state of the pulse indicates reaction. All substitutes for this remedy are but the cachet of the most efficacious and safe means of cure, those which are more feeble are really more numerous in the end. Because by tampering with tonic rheumatism, though we may actually remove the symptoms of fever and inflammation, we remove nothing else, and the disease which we have been endeavouring to destroy, meets us in a more inveterate shape. Hence too, the propriety of copious bloodletting. An overtimorous use of the lancet is in the same way injurious, and has I believe given rise to the opinion that bleeding in this disease, induces slow recoveries and chronic rheumatism.

Cathartics are valuable auxiliaries of,

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phlebotomy. Mercurial and saline purges are considered the best at the commencement, but when the disease has abated a decoction of squill, senega, gum ammoniac, taken cold in doses of a wineglass full several times a day, has been found eminently beneficial. It proves both diuretic and purgative. Flo. sulph and Magnesia combined and used with care, have likewise been productive of good effects.

Emetics may also be used with advantage, particularly in miasmatic districts. They appear to arouse a proper degree of healthy action, and produce a susceptibility of remedial impressions. They determine to the surface, and promote diaphoresis.

Diaphoretics are valuable remedies in rheumatism; but they are to be used without caution. In the early stage of tonic rheumatism before the phlogistic diathesis is reduced by the means above described, dia-

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sweries would be injurious and are to be avoided. Even involuntary sweating at this period has been found to aggravate the symptoms. But ~~when~~ after venesection and cathartics have been judiciously employed, diaphoretics may be administered with good effect. A proper practitioner will, however still discriminate between those diaphoretics which are highly stimulant, and those of milder operation; for the former are not to be used at any stage of tonic chemosis. The best are such as act upon the skin and of these **sulphur** has been much approved. So combinations of ipecacuanha and opium in the form of Dovers powder and nitrous powders, stand high.

These are the leading remedies which are calculated to act upon the system in general. Bark and arsenic, which have popular much reputation in European practice are not so highly esteemed in this country as in other intermittent

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matism. When the system has been fitted by these general depletory remedies, the parts affected are next to be attended to. At this period, topical blood-letting will be found eminently useful, also friction of the parts with the application of rubefacients, mercurial inunction particularly when there is rigidity or muscular contraction, plaster of tartar emetic, embrocations, flannel rollers, vesicants, and blisters.

The atonic rheumatism is distinguished from the tonic, as we have before mentioned, in not being accompanied by pyrexia and local inflammation. Instead of these there prevails in this form of the disease an antiphlogistic diathesis, and the parts affected are cold and stiff. This difference indicates a correspondent difference of treatment, and we accordingly find that the object of the most approved remedies employed in chronic rheumatism, is to restore a healthy tone to the system in general and

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in particular, to the seat of the disease.

For the purpose of diffusing excitement, which is chiefly withdrawn to the brain, purging is very useful. In low states of chronic rheumatism, bark arsenic and sulphur are said to be beneficial. Cayenne pepper used in the form of pills is cordial stimulant, and improves digestion; and other vegetable tonics may be advantageously exhibited.

Diaphoretics are also prescribed in this form of the disease. Their utility depends mainly on their power in equalizing excitement. For this purpose the most active have been employed. Those are most approved which act chiefly upon the surface without inducing much sweat, such as the volatile alkali, volatile tinct. of guiacum, and the turpinthenate preparations. Of all the remedies of this class, the cavine seems to bear the

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palm. It stimulates the whole system and exciting little or no perspiration causes a universal glow; and exerts so happy an influence over the circulation that the pulse from being weak and frequent becomes strong full and slow. But these important effects we are informed can only be expected, when the medicine is indiciously exhibited. Its use is peculiarly called for in those cases, where there is coldness of the surface & especially of the extremities; when the joints are covered with a cold clammy moisture, and generally in those instances, in which the rubifacient remedies are usually recommended. Flannel next to the skin and general friction with the flesh brush, will prove an important aid to other remedies. Such local applications may be advantageously employed as are adapted to produce excitement and healthy action in the parts, namely, sinapism, oil of

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of turpentine, the rubifacients generally, mercurial inunction, electricity, the flannel roller, friction with slightly vesicating substances, plaisters of tartarized antimony, the tincture of Canthardes.

Another remedy which has been often used in rheumatism, is the bath, either cold or tepid. The former is scarcely ever advisable. The sea bath has been sometime recommended, and if it could be had without exposure to the cool and damp atmosphere of the seashore, it might be of essential service; but I apprehend that the general experience of the patients who have tried it goes to prove that the benefits resulting from the saline properties of this bath, are overbalanced by the damp and cold to which the patient is subjected. Of the cold bath generally, it may be observed, that in tonic rheumatism it excites, and in the atonic,

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it depresses the system, so that in each case it tends to foster, instead of subduing the morbid diathesis.

In connexion with this part of the subject I take the liberty of adding a short account of the Sulphur and Hot springs of Virginia which are used with excellent effect in rheumatism, and some of which I visited under the pressure of this disease, in the summer of 1820. The Sulphur spring in Green Briar County commonly called the White Sulphur is used internally, and is very penetrating and actively purgative. It is an interesting fact in regard to this water, that after drinking it for some time, silver worn in the pocket & the cases of silver watches are blackened; whether in consequence of the saturation of the system or of the atmosphere around the spring, I leave others to determine. The water as I was informed has been analyzed

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by an Italian chemist was discovered to contain as its principal mineral ingredients, sulphur and magnesia. Though emitting sulphuretted gas it is not disagreeable to the taste. As it flows out of the spring and wends along its course, it deposits a substance resembling magnesia which is applied to ringworms, tetter, and other cutaneous eruptions. The White Sulphur is much resorted to by persons afflicted with many chronic diseases, with rheumatism, gout and bilious affections. In rheumatism it is used as an introductory remedy. After the patient has drunk sufficiently of this water to cleanse his stomach & bowels, and to feel the other good effects of it in the wholesome excitement which it disseminates, he repairs to the Hot Springs in Bath County. It might indeed be deemed prudent in very delicate cases to take the Warm Spring in the same County as an intermediate step, but whether

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from an experience of its inefficacy or from whatever cause, I found this a resort of the healthy and fashionable only. The Hot Springs consist of three fountains, all differing in temperature; one being 96°, another 98°, and the third 108° of Farenheit's Thermometer. Above the last mentioned, is erected a small house furnished with a number of beds, which are plentifully supplied with blankets. After the patient has been immersed from 8 to 15 minutes, (few can stay so long in this Spring which is called the Boiler,) he is carefully covered up in a bed where he remains an hour or longer. By these means diaphoresis is effected to an extent almost incredible to relate, and far beyond any thing I ever witnessed elsewhere. The blankets are removed one by one, allowing a short interval between each removal; the patient again plunges for a minute or two into the

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bath, after which he wipes himself perfectly dry with flannel, and if disposed to exercise, does so at pleasure, either riding or walking.

When this bath has been used for 10 or 15 days in this manner, it has been recommended to make use of the Sweet Spring, a chalybeate water, or of the Red Sulphur, which is said to be highly restorative. This last mentioned spring I did not visit; nor do I know whether its water has ever been analyzed. — I am satisfied from my own observation and experience, that these several waters, used in the way described are exceedingly beneficial to rheumatic patients, though I regret to say, that I did not remain long enough to give them a perfect trial in my own case.

I shall conclude by remarking that a remedy has recently been introduced in this city, which promises to be of the greatest benefit in atonic rheumatism. I allude to

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sulphurous fumigations, which kindle a glowing excitement throughout the system; and, acting immediately upon the skin, seem to comprize all the best properties of the most approved diaphoretics, without any of their countervailing effects. →